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Flirtation with Fascism: American Pragmatic Liberals and Mussolini's Italy

JOHN P. DIGGINS*

This is the day of pragmatism, not dogmatism—of realism, but a realism that can also be rich in spiritual ideals, and I want to go on record at the beginning of this unpretentious book by avowing my faith in Benito Mussolini, Italy's great premier, and Fascism, the child of his marvellous brain, as the highest expression of a pragmatic philosophy of government whose invariable formula is: "Does it work?"—

US Congressman Milford W. Howard¹

IT is a strange irony of history that Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship drew more admiration from democratic America than from any other Western nation. "The historian of the next generation," Harold Laski told Americans in 1923, "cannot fail to be impressed by the different reception accorded to the changes of which Lenin and Mussolini have been the chief authors. Where Lenin's system has won for itself international ostracism and armed intervention, that of Mussolini has been the subject of widespread enthusiasm."² The sources of Mussolini's popularity in this country may be easily explained, at first glance, by the action of peculiar forces in American society. A middle-class, property-conscious nation, confronted by the towering antithetical figures of Lenin and Mussolini, would naturally turn to the charismatic Italian who paraded as the savior of capitalism. A nation of churchgoers, faced with a crisis in moral values, would understandably respond to the image of Mussolini as the redeemer who turned back the tide of materialism and anticlericalism in Italy. And a nationalistic people, reacting to Wilsonian internationalism, could readily applaud Mussolini's scorn for the League of Nations and praise the Fascist virtue of patriotism.³

Considerations of property, religion, and nationalism, however, provide

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¹ Milford W. Howard, *Fascism: A Challenge to Democracy* (New York, 1928), 18-19.

² Harold J. Laski, "Lenin and Mussolini," *Foreign Affairs*, II (Sept. 1923), 52.

³ John P. Diggins, "Mussolini's Italy: The View from America, 1922-1941," doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1964, Chap. 1.

only a partial explanation of Fascism's reception in the United States. When closely examined, the American response to Mussolini and interpretation of his movement reveal an array of antinomies that almost defies ideological analysis. The spectrum of American apologists for Fascism included the countless businessmen who waxed rhapsodic over *Il Duce* as the proper antidote to Bolshevism;⁴ the poet Ezra Pound who wrote paeans to the Italian strong man for crushing the creatures of capitalism and their "usurocratic conspiracy";⁵ the managerial idealists who extolled Mussolini as the ideal industrial executive who "cuts through" and gets things done;⁶ the "Southern Agrarian" Stark Young who romanticized Mussolini's regime as a noble effort to preserve historic Italy from the evils of modern technology and the efficiency ethic;⁷ the philosopher George Santayana who interpreted the Fascist principle of *gerarchia* as an expression of his own vision of a social hierarchy based on order, inequality, and aristocracy;⁸ and the philosopher Giuseppe Prezzolini who saw the Black Shirts carrying forward the egalitarian class struggle under the radical banner of a "nationalist socialism."⁹ Mussolini and Fascism, in a word, could be many things to many men. To the "New Humanist" Irving Babbitt, Mussolini restored the disciplining "doctrines of the right man for the doctrine of the rights of man";¹⁰ to the novelist Kenneth Roberts, Fascism offered the violent revolutionary answer to the decadence of middle-class liberalism;¹¹ to the Marxist *New Masses*, Fascism was the death rattle of a senescent capitalist system;¹² to the ultra-conservative *American Review*, Fascism provided the last best hope for a return to the "enlightened" era of medieval traditionalism.¹³

The variety of interpretations reflected not only the diverse perspectives of American thought but also the amorphous nature of early Fascism itself,

⁴ E.g., "Why Mussolini Charms the American Businessman," *Literary Digest*, LXXVII (June 9, 1923), 72-74; on the shifting perspectives of business opinion, see Diggins, "Mussolini's Italy," Chap. III.

⁵ Ezra Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (London, 1935), and *Money Pamphlets: America, Roosevelt and the Causes of the Present War*, tr. Carmine Amore (London, 1951).

⁶ *Nation's Business*, XV (Dec. 1927), 20-22.

⁷ Stark Young, "Notes on Fascism in Italy Today," *New Republic*, LXVII (July 22, 29, Aug. 5, 1931), 258-60, 281-83, 312-14.

⁸ George Santayana, "Apologia Pro Mente Sua," in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago, 1940), 497-605; regarding Santayana's disillusionment with the "adventurer" Mussolini, see *The Letters of George Santayana*, ed. Daniel Cory (New York, 1955), 405.

⁹ Giuseppe Prezzolini, "Fascisti and the Class Struggle," *New Republic*, XXXII (Nov. 1, 1922), 242-44, "Mussolini's First Year," *ibid.*, XXXVI (Oct. 31, 1923), 25-26.

¹⁰ Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston, 1924), 246, 313.

¹¹ Kenneth Roberts, *Black Magic* (Indianapolis, 1922).

¹² *New Masses*, V (Apr. 1930), 4; see also editor Mike Gold's reply to Ezra Pound, *ibid.* (Oct. 1930), 3-5.

¹³ E.g., Harold Goad, "The Corporate State," *American Review*, I (Apr. 1933), 80-93.

a movement that was, as H. Stuart Hughes observed, "the first great political surprise" of our century.¹⁴ Emerging as a novel social theory, the hazy and synthetic doctrines of Fascism enabled Mussolini to exploit the ambiguity of his movement and present to Americans a many-sided image. Of all the images he enjoyed in America, the one that received greatest attention from intellectuals was his pose as the practicing pragmatic statesman. That the dictator could claim the philosophy of William James and John Dewey to justify authoritarian reaction only emphasizes the essential ambiguity that characterized the early Fascist movement. More importantly, since the principles of pragmatism constituted a major force in the shaping of modern American liberalism, this essay focuses on the reactions of liberals, particularly pragmatic liberals, to the rise of Italian Fascism.

Looking back, the novelist Robert Penn Warren, who completed his fictional study of American demagoguery and Fascism while in Rome during the thirties, recalled that behind the reaction in Mussolini's Italy and in Huey Long's Louisiana lay the long shadow of the "scholarly and benign figure of William James."¹⁵ Unfortunately, the notion that the brilliant pioneer of pragmatic thought influenced Fascism was widely entertained in the twenties. This native American philosophy, it is true, found a brief following among Italian intellectuals at the turn of the century, but pragmatism proved incompatible with the transcendental idealism of Giovanni Papini, Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile, and other influential thinkers.¹⁶ Still, the propaganda potential contained in this Italo-American cultural tie could not be ignored by champions of reaction seeking democratic respectability to give an aura of doctrinal legitimacy to the Fascist government. Hence, whenever Mussolini spoke to Americans about his intellectual development he frequently cited James as one of his principal mentors. The influence of James was more apparent than real. When the pragmatist Horace Kallen questioned the Premier about James's philosophy, Mussolini could make only vague references to titles of books, and Kallen came away from the interview convinced that the dictator was more interested in the philosopher's reputation than in his ideas.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the pragmatic posture of the Italian statesman elicited enthusiastic acclaim from a number of American students of politics who re-

¹⁴ H. Stuart Hughes, *Contemporary Europe* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1961), 215.

¹⁵ Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York, 1953), vi, and "All the King's Men: Matrix of Experience," *Yale Review*, LIII (Winter 1964), 161-67.

¹⁶ Giovanni Gullace, "The Pragmatist Movement in Italy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXIII (Jan.-Mar. 1962), 91-105.

¹⁷ Horace Kallen, "Fascism: For the Italians," *New Republic*, XLIX (Jan. 12, 1927), 211, and "Mussolini, William James, and the Rationalists," *Social Frontier*, IV (May 1938), 253-56.

garded Mussolini as something of a Jamesian philosopher-king. William K. Stewart of Dartmouth College, for example, became convinced, after studying Fascism's philosophical origins, that the Italian Premier operated as a wise improviser in "a world with the lid off," as James had termed the world of flux and change. The Italian "Battle of the Grain" program, said Stewart, was the clearest example of James's "Moral Equivalent of War" principle, an "equivalent discipline" for the energetic Fascist state.¹⁸ Phillip Marshall Brown, professor of international law at Princeton University, maintained that, unlike Marxism and other "preconceived" a priori theories, Fascism had its basis in "experience," and "its philosophy is pragmatism; its sole guiding principle is that working principles are to be discovered in actual practice."¹⁹ Some scholars saw Fascism as the natural reintegrating response to the centrifugal effects of democratic pluralism;²⁰ others admired Mussolini for repudiating the sterile ideas of the past and formulating a "scientific" philosophy suitable to the contingencies of an irrational world.²¹ In a provocative article in *Harper's*, Lothrop Stoddard advised Americans that the tough-mindedness of Fascist thought presented "the great intellectual challenge of the age," which laid bare the rigid determinism of Marxism and the shallow formalism of democracy, permitting both experimentation with "hard-headed practicality" and manipulation of myths (such as nationalism) to give free play to the moving power of beliefs discovered by James and Georges Sorel.²²

Mass democracy, the pragmatic defense of Fascism suggested, was questionable; universal democracy was unworkable. It is perhaps not surprising that a conservative nativist like Stoddard would reach such a conclusion. That a small but highly significant number of liberals reached the same conclusion represented a reorientation of the progressive's democratic convictions, a reorientation that was part of a larger intellectual malaise characteristic of the postwar period. The failure of Wilsonianism and the demise of progressivism led to a cold re-examination of the uneasy assumptions of liberal thought regarding the rationality and goodness of man, the certainty of moral values and political standards, and the inevitability of human

¹⁸ William K. Stewart, "The Mentors of Mussolini," *American Political Science Review*, XXII (Nov. 1928), 843-69.

¹⁹ Phillip Marshall Brown, "The Utility of Fascism," *Current History*, XXXIV (May 1931), 161-64.

²⁰ W. B. Munro, "The Pendulum of Politics," *Harper's*, CLIV (May 1927), 718-25.

²¹ This view was expounded by Italian writers; see, for example, Corrado Gini's positivistic interpretation, "The Scientific Basis of Fascism," *Political Science Quarterly*, XLII (June 1927), 99-115.

²² Lothrop Stoddard, "Realism: The True Challenge of Fascism," *Harper's*, CLV (Oct. 1927), 578-83.

progress and world democracy.²³ During the twenties progressives like Walter Weyl and Harold Stearns concluded that the idea of democracy was indeed moribund, Walter Lippmann questioned the wisdom of majority rule and the intelligence of the mass public, and John Chamberlain abandoned the whole democratic dream.²⁴ Those on the far Left, armed with the Marxist critique of bourgeois democracy, declared that the bankruptcy of liberalism left them with, in the words of Max Eastman, "this inexorable alternative—Lenin or Mussolini."²⁵ Attacked from both Left and Right, progressives found themselves without a vigorous intellectual defense. For them faith in democracy had been eroded by the rude facts of history, and the philosophical rationale of the "vital center"—pragmatism—now offered liberals little more than methodology and a set of preferences based on faith in human intelligence.²⁶ While Communists and Fascists tried to rush into this ideological vacuum, both claiming the infallibility of science, Croce attempted to reassure Americans that liberalism was still a vital force and that Fascism was merely "transitory and provisory."²⁷

Few Americans could share Croce's faith in the inevitable triumph of liberty. For the generation of the twenties, Mussolini appeared to many as the harbinger of a new political movement, one that rejected the tired dogmas of democracy and the paralyzing principles of liberalism. Nowhere is this point of view better illustrated than in the reaction of Lincoln Steffens to the advent of Fascism.

A leading fighter for democratic reform in the progressive era, Steffens came to regard Mussolini as one of the few men who emerged from the war enlightened by realism rather than betrayed by idealism. Interviewing Mussolini at the Lausanne Conference, Steffens was stunned when the statesman turned on him and "shot that searching question into me." Had not the innocent American liberals learned anything in the war, *Il Duce* contemptuously asked. "God's question to man, that!" Steffens reflected, pondering the plight of liberals who refused to learn from experience ("the conscience of history") and remained bound by the "dead logic" of their own preconceptions. Legalism, constitutions, and parliaments were only sham institutions

²³ Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York, 1959).

²⁴ Walter Weyl, *Tired Radicals* (New York, 1920); Harold Stearns, *Liberalism in America* (New York, 1919); Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1922); John Chamberlain, *Farewell to Reform* (New York, 1932).

²⁵ Max Eastman, "Political Liberty," in *Freedom in the Modern World*, ed. Horace Kallen (New York, 1928), 159-82.

²⁶ Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (New York, 1957), Chap. xii.

²⁷ Benedetto Croce, "Has Liberalism a Future?" *New Republic*, XLII (Apr. 29, 1925), 256-58.

controlled by "petty persons with petty purposes." Mussolini, like Albert Einstein, succeeded because he challenged ancient axioms. The leaders of the Bolsheviks and the Fascists were men of action whose "Russian-Italian method" forced Steffens to ask himself: "Is not the whole moral basis of liberalism and [democratic] political action unscientific?" Is not liberty a psychological matter, "a measure of our sense of security," a state of mind that can be realized only when new economic arrangements abolish fear? Although Steffens confessed he had no clear answer to his own question, he remained fascinated by the empirical technique of Fascism and believed that Mussolini's charismatic dictatorship of the Right could lead to a new realistic path to the goals of the Left.²⁸

Former muckrakers like S. S. McClure and Ida Tarbell also returned from Italy singing praises of the dynamic statesman who, like Theodore Roosevelt, revitalized his country with an outburst of strenuous idealism.²⁹ Many reporters, of course, fell prey to the blandishments of Fascist officials and to the charm of their leader (a "despot with a dimple," sighed Tarbell). But serious scholars in this country were interested in the experimental features of the corporate state. During the twenties traditional economic ideas and institutions were subjected to a searching revaluation, and, significantly enough, the announcement of the theory of corporatism came at a time when American intellectuals themselves were groping toward a positive reconstruction of society.³⁰ Whether this reconstruction would lead to controlled currency, economic institutionalism, or scientific management, the answer, liberals were convinced, could be found neither in economic individualism nor in Marxist socialism. The historic bourgeois liberal state appeared too factional and artificial and only masked the real sources of economic power. Under our capitalist democracy, Oswald Garrison Villard stated in 1925, power continued to "elude the people."³¹ This was also the case in the socialist state where, as events in Russia demonstrated, repressive political power simply replaced oppressive economic power. Searching for a new experiment that would avoid acquisitive individualism and socialist regimentation, a number of pragmatic liberals revived their prewar discus-

²⁸ *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (2 vols., New York, 1931), II, 812-20, and "Stop, Look, Listen," *Survey*, LVII (Mar. 1, 1927), 735-37; with the coming of the depression and Nazism, Steffens repudiated Fascism. (*Letters of Lincoln Steffens*, ed. Ella Winter and Granville Hicks [2 vols., New York, 1938], II, 648, 750-51, 938.)

²⁹ *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1927, Mar. 12, 1928; Ida Tarbell, *All in the Day's Work* (New York, 1939), 380-84.

³⁰ The liberals' desire to reconstruct society on the basis of some principle that would unify institutions and classes was stated persuasively by T. V. Smith in his popular work *The Democratic Way of Life* (New York, 1927).

³¹ Oswald Garrison Villard, "Facing Our World," *Nation*, CXXI (Sept. 2, 1925), 248.

sion of the virtues of Graham Wallas' and G. D. H. Cole's syndicalism and guild socialism.³² When the theory of corporatism was first proclaimed in 1926 it appeared that the Italian system integrated the best of these British ideas into its plans for a workers' confederation, achieving a more genuine representation than that offered by any contemporary government. It is no coincidence that in the years 1926-1928 Italian Fascism commanded more attention from American intellectuals. A system based upon the guiding influence of a paternal state, a system that brought to the surface the subterranean struggles of classes and interest groups and harmonized these forces in official institutions, struck a positive note in the minds of those political thinkers tired of the old formulas and fictions of progressivism. The philosopher Herbert W. Schneider's study of Italy in 1928 and the historian Charles Beard's response to this study best reflected this attitude.

Schneider had been sent to Italy by Charles E. Merriam of the National Social Science Research Council in order to investigate more closely the unprecedented political movement. Concerned primarily with the theory underlying corporatism and with the syndicalist aspirations of Edmondo Rossoni, Schneider was greatly impressed by this new "institutional synthesis" which allowed Italy to coordinate private interests in the service of higher "national interests," thereby realizing a "conscious, intelligent ordering of society." Because Schneider regarded the Lockian concept of a contractual, atomistic government as unreal and impractical, and because he maintained that only economic interests and not individual citizens could be truly represented in any government, he dismissed the Fascist struggle with parliament as "a mere stage play" and praised the regime for penetrating the ineffective fictions of formal democracy.³³

When Schneider returned from Italy in 1928 Beard enthusiastically questioned him about his research.³⁴ Like the philosopher, the historian was undisturbed by the antidemocratic nature of Fascism and pointed out that the ancient Greeks and the "fathers of the American Republic, notably Hamilton, Madison, and John Adams, were as voluminous and vehement [in opposing democracy] as any Fascist could desire." Untroubled by the excessive nationalism of the Fascists, he likened Mussolini's nervous energy to the "American gospel of action, action, action," preached and practiced by Theodore Roosevelt. But instead of focusing on these activist aspects, Beard

³² Joseph Dorfman, *Economic Mind in American Civilization* (5 vols., New York, 1946-59), IV, 184-86.

³³ Herbert W. Schneider, *Making the Fascist State* (New York, 1928), *Italy Incorporated* (New York, 1928), "Italy's New Syndicalist Constitution," *Political Science Quarterly*, XLII (June 1927), 161-202.

³⁴ Interview with Schneider, Aug. 25, 1964.

suggested that Americans turn their attention to the "original feature of Fascism," to the philosophy of corporatism with its elaborate schemes for council functions and occupational representation. It was through this instrument that Italy alone had "brought about by force of the State the most compact and unified organization of capitalists and laborers into two camps which the world has ever seen." Although Beard admitted that capital enjoyed advantages over labor in Italy, and although he regarded Mussolini as an impetuous adventurer who might resort to war rather than face up to domestic problems, he believed that through "patience and technical competence" Italy could modernize itself by relying on the practical wisdom of corporatism and class collaboration. Viewing Italy as something akin to a political laboratory, he called upon American liberals to take a broader look at the regime.

This is far from the frozen dictatorship of the Russian Tsardom; it is more like the American check and balance system; and it may work out in a new democratic direction. . . . Beyond question, an amazing experiment is being made here, an experiment in reconciling individualism and socialism, politics and technology. It would be a mistake to allow feelings aroused by contemplating the harsh deeds and extravagant assertions that have accompanied the Fascist process (as all other immense historical changes) to obscure the potentialities and the lessons of the adventure—no, not adventure, but destiny riding without any saddle and bridle across the historic peninsula that bridges the world of antiquity and our modern world.³⁵

Schneider and Beard found Fascist corporatism an enlightened economic theory, the former because it appeared a coherent system of national planning that transcended classes and class interests, the latter because it recalled a modern Madisonian expression of the equilibrium of contending social forces. Other liberals looked favorably on Fascism for different reasons. One of the few American liberals who had firsthand experience in Italy was Horace Kallen, a student of James and a professor of social philosophy. After traveling throughout Europe in 1926 he returned to address American intellectuals on the myths and realities of the "new" Italy. Kallen's defense of the regime appeared in the *New Republic*, where he admitted that the ruthless militarism and the "paranoid magniloquence" contained in Fascism made it a movement liberals would find difficult to accept. But these repelling aspects, the philosopher cautioned, should not shroud the substantial accomplishments in economic, educational, and administrative reform. Living in Italy, he advised, made one realize there could be "intolerance of lib-

³⁵ Charles Beard, "Making the Fascist State," *New Republic*, LVII (Jan. 23, 1929), 277–78.

eralism also." Fascism, a theory that, in contrast to socialism, stressed "human differences" and reinvigorated the spirit of nationalism and of the *Risorgimento*, was the proper philosophy for the peculiar history, needs, and psychology of the Italian people. Liberals should therefore suspend judgment until the full-grown tree of the new theory bore the fruit of social justice or the seeds of oppressive reaction. "In this respect," concluded Kallen, "the Fascist revolution is not unlike the Communist revolution. Each is the application by force majeure of an ideology to a condition. Each should have the freest opportunity once it has made a start, of demonstrating whether it be an exploitation of men by a special interest or a fruitful endeavor after the good life."³⁶

Kallen's plea for patience won the backing of the *New Republic*. In an editorial the liberal journal provided a supporting preface to Kallen's arguments by elaborating further on the need to give Fascism a sympathetic hearing. In view of the bleak record of Italy's parliamentary government from 1871 to 1921, advised the editorial, it was a "great mistake" to judge harshly and narrowly the recent regime. One could not measure the political actions of another country by one's own standards and values. Fascism had given the Italians a sense of unity and direction, a national self-consciousness that awakened the country's potential. The militarism of the Fascists should not alarm us, for their boastfulness was nothing more than a "virile and somewhat pathetic attempt to compensate for the absence of such power." Seen in the light not only of the "weary centuries" of Italy's past but of the general instability of contemporary European governments, the promising Fascist venture, however costly it may have proved, could not be any worse than sinking back into the "stagnation" and "cheap corruption" of traditional parliamentary politics.³⁷

The apologetics of the *New Republic* revealed the ambivalence of pragmatic liberalism as well as the ambiguous appeal of Fascism itself. Although the liberals' support of the movement was, as we shall see, brief and confined to a small minority, the approval of this group of thinkers could not be understood apart from the tenets of pragmatic philosophy, tenets that provided both the strengths and weaknesses in this rich vein of American social thought. For Fascism appealed, first of all, to the pragmatic ethos of experimentation. It held out a new possibility for integrating man with his technological environment. If the system called for sacrificing temporarily certain liberties, through collective effort and organized intelligence the Ital-

³⁶ Kallen, "Fascism," 211-13.

³⁷ "An Apology for Fascism," *New Republic*, XLIX (Jan. 12, 1927), 207-209.

ians could learn from this educational experience. And just as each individual must learn from experience, the Italians themselves could best judge the results of the regime. Exactly how the people would render this judgment, with their political parties destroyed and civil liberties crushed, the *New Republic* did not say. The fruits of Fascism, liberals were told, could and must be submitted to "measurement." The Fascists attempted to promote "national cohesion and national welfare," and the "conscience of the Italian people will insist on appraising the result. Thus, willy-nilly, Fascism is an experiment. . . . If the Italian people are capable of political self-education, they will preserve that part of the program which is useful to them and discard that which is not."³⁸

No less important in the Fascist appeal to liberals was the apparent non-doctrinaire character of the Mussolini government. The Italian philosopher Papini was fond of saying that pragmatism was a method of doing without a philosophy. It might also be said that to some American liberals Fascism was a method of doing without an ideology. Beard, for example, was pleased to find Fascism open and flexible and unencumbered by any "consistent scheme."³⁹ Unlike socialism, Fascism recognized that the road to reform was relative. When the political scholar Robert MacIver asked the *New Republic* how it could profess to be an "exponent of liberal principles" and at the same time support a dictatorship, and why suppression was so necessary in Italy if Fascism meant, as the *New Republic* claimed, "mastery and self-control,"⁴⁰ the journal replied that the traditional "formulas" of liberalism were inadequate to appraise developments either in Italy or in Russia. Comparing the deep-rooted particularism of the Italian Peninsula to the sectionalism that brought on the American Civil War, the *New Republic* argued that just as the North had had to resort to force and bloodshed to save the Union and end slavery so too did the Fascists have to use similar methods to end the strife and disunity that plagued postwar Italy. Moreover, because of the "collective irresponsibility" of the Italian Left, which failed to rally to the defense of the state as had the French parliamentarians in the Dreyfus affair, the old statesmen surrendered by default their right to lead the nation. Thus, although the *New Republic* did not approve of the suppression of liberty in Italy, it found itself unable to pass judgment since it had not (as MacIver claimed) set itself up as an "exponent" of such vacuous and abstract categories as "liberal principles." "Liberalism, as we understand it," reminded the editorial, "is an activity. It is an effort to emancipate human life by means

³⁸ "Liberalism vs. Fascism," *ibid.*, L (Mar. 2, 1927), 35.

³⁹ Beard, "Making the Fascist State," 277.

⁴⁰ Robert MacIver, letter to editor, *New Republic*, L (Mar. 2, 1927), 47.

of the discovery and the realization of truth. But truth emerges as a function of individual and corporate life, and it needs for its vindication the subordination of principles to method."⁴¹ So conceived, liberalism shared with Fascism a common scorn for definite systems and fixed theories. Fascism, like liberalism, appeared to be a continuous creative effort that found its affirmation in the subordination of ends to means. In its attempt to strike a balance between the dogmas of capitalism and socialism, moreover, Fascism avoided doctrinal myopia. Rejecting the fetishes of both the Left and Right, it presented an admirable alternative to an ironclad ideology on the one hand and a tenaciously shallow sentimentalism on the other. This sailing without an ideological ballast was politically dangerous, the *New Republic* admitted, but it was also intellectually adventurous.

As an exciting adventure, however, Fascism offered more than a repudiation of ideology and a case study of scientific politics and social engineering. The editor of the *New Republic* had long insisted that reform must be more than a matter of empirical method.⁴² If liberalism were to have any deeper personal meaning, Herbert Croly insisted in 1922, it must transcend technology and achieve a spiritual reconstruction of society.⁴³ Five years later, when Croly was coming to grips with Fascism, the *New Republic* was defining liberalism in terms of "self-knowledge" and "self-liberation."⁴⁴ More than social justice, liberalism should work toward a religious regeneration that could not be realized through the traditional efforts of reformers, "who attempt to redeem human nature without asking human beings to participate in their own redemption." The Fascist counterpart of the "Socratic Liberalism" of the *New Republic* was the *élan* of Italian nationalism, which Croly believed would enable the Italians to master themselves through a renewal of moral vision. "Alien critics should beware," liberals were thus warned, "of outlawing a political experiment which aroused in a whole nation an increased moral energy and dignified its activities by subordinating them to a deeply felt common purpose."⁴⁵ The *New Republic* could not help but admire an original philosophy that broke through the husk to reach the

⁴¹ "Liberalism vs. Fascism," 36.

⁴² There can be no question that the editorials on Fascism were the work of Herbert Croly alone. Bruce Bliven, who succeeded Croly as editor in 1929, writes: "These editorials were, I am sure, all the work of Herbert Croly. . . . While he was editor of the paper, he would always listen to arguments by other members of the staff in opposition to his own views . . . but when he felt something strongly, he insisted on expressing it as the editorial view." (Letter from Bliven to me, Mar. 10, 1965.)

⁴³ E.g., Herbert Croly, "Reconstruction of Religion," *New Republic*, XXXI (June 21, 1922), 100-102.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, "Realistic Liberalism," *ibid.*, LIII (Nov. 23, 1927), 5-7, and "Socratic Liberalism," *ibid.* (Dec. 28, 1927), 155-57.

⁴⁵ "Apology for Fascism," 208-209.

human heart, that claimed to present a new political "science" freed of false emotions yet emotional enough to move a nation of people, that displayed to the world a hopeful example of rational class reconciliation and high national purpose.

Fascism's appeal to liberals, then, was found in its experimental nature, antidogmatic temper, and moral *élan*. Their friendly interest, most pronounced in the years 1926–1928, may be best described as a positive but cautious curiosity, one riddled with doubt about the use of violence and the "moonshine" pretensions of Fascist aspirations.⁴⁶ As the decade drew to a close, the freshness of Fascism waned and the *New Republic* grew wary of the Italian government, commenting critically on the increasing "archaic imperialism" of Mussolini, his "perilous" attempt at autarchy, and his sustained suppression of liberty.⁴⁷ Ultimately, however, it was not only the unfulfilled promises of the regime but the death of Croly in 1929, the impact of the depression shortly afterward, and the immigration of Italian *fuorusciti* that brought a complete repudiation of Fascism. Croly's death meant the passing from the *New Republic* of his brand of liberalism, and as his successor, Bruce Bliven, recalls, liberals learned about Italy from Giuseppe Borgese, Max Ascoli, Count Sforza, and other exiles who began to arrive in the United States in increasing numbers in the late twenties.⁴⁸ The depression, in addition, caused a profound shift in liberal thinking about both capitalism and corporatism. Under the spell of Marxist prophecy, some pragmatic liberals tended to reinterpret Fascism as the decadent response of a historically condemned system. The belated repudiation of Fascism was, therefore, also a rejection of the very middle-of-the-road policy of managed capitalism that seemed so attractive in the 1920's. Liberals like Kallen traveled to Russia and admired the Soviet Five-Year Plans.⁴⁹ By 1930 the courtship with corporatism had ended; the romance with collectivism had begun.

In the critical years of the depression the New Deal and corporatism alike came in for the same criticism, for both systems failed to destroy the capitalist order. Some liberals assailed the trial-and-error approach of the Roosevelt program because it was too experimental and lacked a systematic hypothesis.⁵⁰ Not only did the New Deal lack theoretical direction; it came

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 207–208.

⁴⁷ *New Republic*, LI (June 6, 1927), 56; *ibid.*, LII (Aug. 24, 1927), 82; *ibid.*, LIII (Nov. 23, 1927), 2; *ibid.*, LIV (Apr. 11, 1928), 232. Kallen's support was similarly short lived. (See his "Arts under a Dictatorship," *Saturday Review of Literature*, V [Dec. 29, 1928], 549–51.)

⁴⁸ Letter from Bliven to me, Mar. 10, 1965.

⁴⁹ Lewis S. Feuer, "Travelers to the Soviet Union: The Formation of a Component of New Deal Ideology," *American Quarterly*, XIV (Summer 1962), 119–42.

⁵⁰ John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York, 1935), 87–93.

to be regarded as a futile attempt at corporatism itself, an attempt that stopped short of fundamental social reform and perpetuated the "contradictions of capitalism" that led to domestic fascism.⁵¹ It is indeed ironic that liberals now leveled the charge of creeping corporatism at the New Deal, only to be answered by businessmen, journalists, engineers, economists, and managerialists, all of whom defended the corporate state and the National Recovery Administration as marvelous attempts at bold experimentation and orderly planning.⁵² The rhetoric of the liberal "Apology for Fascism" of 1927 was no longer to be found in the pages of the *New Republic* but in the editorials of *Fortune* magazine which in 1934 devoted an entire edition to the corporate state.⁵³ It may also be suggested that the liberals' rejection in the 1930's of both the New Deal and Italian corporatism constituted an abandonment of the pragmatic temper on which their "Apology" had been based, a surrender of experimentalism to an ideology that had, in the name of determinism, declared all-out war on property.

In his recent study of the intellectual sources of the New Deal, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., stated, in reference to the "ideology of social regeneration" and "national planning," that "this native progressivism opposed fascism and communism as brutal and false."⁵⁴ While this statement is doubtless true for the 1930's when the rise of Hitler gave Fascism a demonic image, it overlooks the different tendencies of liberalism in the 1920's, inner tendencies that explain why some liberals were taken in by Italian Fascism and why others, the great majority, were not. In this connection the contrasting reactions of the *New Republic* and of the *Nation* must be considered as reflections of contrasting liberal temperaments. The *New Republic* represented the twentieth-century pragmatic strain of progressivism, the *Nation* the nineteenth-century liberal strain. The difference between these two liberal currents was, among other things, the difference between a relativistic approach to reform on the one hand and a traditional faith in the standard democratic road to social justice on the other, the difference between the empiricism of social engineering and the humanitarianism of "good hope."

⁵¹ George Soule, *The Coming American Revolution* (New York, 1934), 292-94; Stuart Chase, *A New Deal* (New York, 1932), 154-55; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era* (New York, 1934); see also the defense of the New Deal by Gilbert H. Montague, "Is NRA Fascistic?" *Annals, American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CLXXX (July 1935), 149-61.

⁵² William Welk, "Fascist Economic Policy and the NRA," *Foreign Affairs*, XII (Oct. 1933), 98-109; Charles W. Wright, "Capital and Labor under Fascism in Italy," *Annals, American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CLXXIV (July 1934), 166-72; *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1934.

⁵³ *Fortune*, X (July 1934).

⁵⁴ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Sources of the New Deal," in *Paths of American Thought*, ed. *id.* and Morton White (Boston, 1962), 381.

Thus it was the *Nation* that attacked with ringing moral certitudes the Americans who doubted the wisdom of mass rule and glorified the efficacy of the corporate state. There can be no sacrifice of democracy to efficiency, Villard warned the New York *Herald Tribune*, one of the many American papers that had warm praise for Mussolini. "The broader the base of government, the surer its results. Democracy works poorly enough, but there is no substitute for it."⁵⁵ The *Nation's* surviving democratic idealism clearly rendered it better prepared to answer the rise of totalitarianism. But equally important was the *Nation's* attitude toward nationalism. Where the *Nation* had been, even during the war years, vigorously antinationalist, the *New Republic* had looked to nationalism as the driving reform stimulus. In the twenties Croly's faith in nationalism, although chastened by the war, was as unyielding as Villard's faith in formal democracy. The *New Republic* could therefore maintain that "the only way for the Italians to cultivate the sense of unity and common responsibility which is indispensable to self-government is to allow the Fascist doctrine to vaccinate them with a powerful patriotic virus."⁵⁶ To the *Nation* this sort of reasoning smacked of reaction, for odious nationalism and shallow patriotism Villard saw as the enemies of liberalism everywhere. The American counterpart of the Fascists, said the *Nation*, was the Ku Klux Klan. In the name of order, efficiency, and patriotism, Mussolini and Miklós von Horthy, Hitler and Erich Ludendorff, Attorney General A. M. Palmer and the Klan had all attempted to crush democracy by a program of flag-waving fanaticism.⁵⁷ Aside from the pragmatic "methodolatry" of the *New Republic* and the liberal idealism of the *Nation*, it was these differing attitudes toward nationalism that caused the former to regard lightly Mussolini's militarism, to see psychological utility in Fascist slogans, and to admire the cohesive features of corporate theory, while the latter took seriously Mussolini's menacing gestures, looked upon Fascist slogans as cruel lies, and perceived corporatism as mere window dressing that cloaked the interests of unregenerate capitalists.

Croly's lifelong dream of a "New Nationalism," first envisioned in 1912, contained disturbing overtones of authoritarian corporatism.⁵⁸ This passionate quest played no small part in Croly's seeing Fascism (as did Croce before 1925) as a temporary stage through which Italy must pass in order to reach a higher level of political consciousness. Partly as a result, the *New Republic*

⁵⁵ Oswald Garrison Villard, "Mussolini and the Klan," *Nation*, CXIX (July 2, 1924), 5.

⁵⁶ "Apology for Fascism," 208.

⁵⁷ Villard, "Mussolini and the Klan," 5.

⁵⁸ Regarding the charge that Croly's early social philosophy presaged "totalitarian nationalism," see the critique of this argument by Charles B. Forcey, *Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era* (New York, 1961), 36-41.

remained more susceptible to a social movement that called for individual sacrifice and national discipline, hardheaded elitism and egalitarian enthusiasm. Although the *New Republic* objected to Mussolini's arbitrary acts, and although its anti-Fascist contributors outnumbered the defenders of *Il Duce*, it was the *Nation* that attacked Italian reaction from the very beginning. The blistering editorials by Villard and the scathing articles by Carleton Beals, Louis Adamic, James Murphy, and Marcus Duffield all pointed to one conclusion: Mussolini and Fascism meant imperialism and war. When Giacomo Matteotti was murdered, the *Nation* printed the "Filippelli Memorial," a document smuggled out of Italy that implicated high officials of the Fascist government, including Mussolini himself, in the death of the socialist deputy.⁵⁹ No moral condemnation of the murder appeared in the *New Republic*.

The *Nation*, of course, was not the only source of liberal opposition to Fascism in the twenties. The American Civil Liberties Union lent its services to Italian refugees, to immigrants terrorized by the Fascist League of North America, and to Italo-American anti-Fascist publishers harassed by the State Department (acting on the advice of the Italian ambassador).⁶⁰ Clarence Darrow and Robert Morss Lovett won acquittals for two anti-Fascists accused of murdering an Italo-American Black Shirt.⁶¹ Trade-unions took strong stands against the dictatorship; the Italian Chamber of Labor organized in 1923 the American Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America.⁶² The academic community absorbed several exile professors and often made its campuses available for forums conducted by Mussolini's enemies.⁶³ But of greater significance is the fact that even among the majority of pragmatic

⁵⁹ "Who Killed Matteotti?" *Nation*, CXX (Apr. 8, 1925), 392-95.

⁶⁰ On the activities of the Fascists in the United States, see Diggins, "Mussolini's Italy," 43-90, 271-77, 332-37; *Lega Fascisti del Nord America* (New York, 1928), pamphlet, Hoover Library, Stanford, Calif.; *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States*, US Congress, House, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings* (11 vols., Washington, D. C., 1938-44), 75 Cong., 3 sess. (1938), II, esp. 1181-84; Alan Cassels, "Fascism for Export: Italy and the United States in the Twenties," *American Historical Review*, LXIX (Apr. 1964), 707-12. The Italian Foreign Office made every attempt (and succeeded at least once) to persuade the US State Department to instigate legal action to suppress the papers of such anti-Fascists as Carlo Tresca (*Il Martello*), Franco Ballanca (*Il Nuovo Mondo*), and Girolamo Valenti (*La Stampa Libera*). (See the "World War II Collection of Seized Enemy Records, Group 242," container 430, 016053-016143, of the captured Italian documents on microfilm in the National Archives; and *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1927 [3 vols., Washington, D. C., 1942], III, 129-31.)

⁶¹ Aldo Garosci, *Storia dei fuoruscito* (Bari, 1953), 269-70; Robert Morss Lovett, *All Our Years* (New York, 1948), 190-92.

⁶² *New York Times*, Apr. 11, 19, 1923.

⁶³ A notable exception was Columbia University's Italian department and its Casa Italiana which published the *Italy-American Monthly*. (See the series of articles in the *Nation* beginning with "Fascism at Columbia University," CXXXIX [Nov. 7, 1934]; and the reflections of Gaetano Salvemini, *Memorie di un fuoruscito* [Milan, 1960]; and of Giuseppe Prezzolini, *L'Italiano Inutile* [Milan, 1953], esp. 241-90, 363-88.)

liberals Fascism found no audience. Hence the favorable views of Beard, Steffens, Kallen, Schneider, and Croly must be balanced against the attitudes of Morris Ernst, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Thorstein Veblen, James Harvey Robinson, and John Dewey, all of whom were critical of Mussolini's great adventure.

The case of Dewey deserves attention. During the twenties he traveled throughout Europe and the Far East, recording many of his impressions in the *New Republic*. In his numerous articles and multivolume work *Character and Events*, he presented incisive studies of the political cultures of Russia, China, Turkey, and other developing nations. Italy, however, was ignored. It is possible that Dewey avoided visiting Italy because of the tragic death of his beloved son, Morris Dewey, in Milan in 1895.⁶⁴ But a more plausible explanation of his silence on Fascism may be found in his close relationship with Carlo Tresca and in his unfailing commitment to the principles of the open society. Tresca, a colorful anarchist who fought the Fascists on the streets of New York until his assassination in 1943, collaborated with Dewey in championing many causes, including the Sacco and Vanzetti case and the "counter-trial" of Leon Trotsky. From his deep personal friendship with the Italo-American anti-Fascist, Dewey could have formed only the most negative view of the reaction in Italy.⁶⁵ Fascism's blatant attack on democratic values and its exalted irrationalism, moreover, would have been repugnant to Dewey's firm belief in democratic means and his faith in freedom and human intelligence. In one rare instance where Dewey did mention Fascism in the twenties he criticized "the disciples of Lenin and Mussolini [who] vie with the captains of capitalist society in endeavoring to bring about a formation of dispositions and ideas which will conduce to a preconceived goal." To the American educator, Italy's intellectual regimentation and academic thought control, which attempted to instill "a mental picture of some desired end,"⁶⁶ only flew in the face of its own claims to pragmatic openness and spontaneity. Committed to the "sound principle of interdependence of means and end,"⁶⁷ to the conviction that practice validates theory, Dewey remained skeptical of the theoretical tinsel of the Fascist program.

Other liberals like Eduard C. Lindeman and Morris Cohen also had doubts about the ideological claims of Mussolini's Italy. Rather than as a

⁶⁴ I am indebted to M. Halsey Thomas, Dewey's bibliographer, for bringing this information to my attention. (Letter from Thomas to me, Feb. 23, 1965.)

⁶⁵ See Dewey's letter to Tresca in *Ommaggio alla Memoria Imperitua di Carlo Tresca* (New York, 1943), 48.

⁶⁶ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York, 1927), 200.

⁶⁷ *Id.*, "Means and End," *New International*, IV (Aug. 1938), 232-33.

pragmatic experiment, they saw Fascism as a dogmatic state worship that would soon ossify into a "doctrinaire finality."⁶⁸ From a different angle of vision, Walter Lippmann, who earlier in his career had called for a dynamic, pragmatic interpretation of politics, tempered his relativism with a touch of Catholic moral theology in the twenties so that when he surveyed Italy in 1927 he rebuked Fascism for violating the antistatist principles of Thomas Aquinas and Lord Acton.⁶⁹ Finally, many liberals dismissed Fascism as sheer sophistry, perceiving, as they did, a cynical and crude will to power behind the façade of dialectical verbiage. "They proclaim that Fascism is pragmatic, empirical, eclectic," stated one writer after studying Mussolini's speeches. "The pragmatism of the Fascio consists in hitting first, inventing a justification afterwards, and pointing with pride to the efficacy of *ex post facto* wisdom. Empiricism, in Fascist parlance, is Greek for inconsistency."⁷⁰

Despite the widespread opposition among progressives in this country, the fact that Fascism received a "pragmatic sanction" from some American liberals stirred attacks from intellectuals both in Europe and in America. In *La Trahison des Clercs* (1927), Julien Benda indicted James and his followers for focusing on the particular and the practical at the cost of the universal and the spiritual, and for surrendering to an empirical obsession that lost sight of transcendental values and led to authoritarian opportunism.⁷¹ The burden of taking up the antipragmatic assault in the United States was assumed by William Y. Elliott, professor of government at Harvard University. Elliott's criticism of pragmatism sprang less from a basic humanism than from a reverence for normative legalism. In briefest terms, it was Elliott's conviction that Sorel's philosophy of violence stemmed from James's insight into the myth as motive force, that Dewey's stress on "organic" functionalism came too close to Léon Duguit's philosophy of social "solidarism," and that both these syndicalist ideas resulted in antidemocratic reaction. "Instrumentalism is the same development away from the radical empiricism of James's doctrines which Fascism represents in relation to syndicalism." In short, Dewey's collectivism and Sorel's activism, however democratically conceived at the outset, carried the seeds of authoritarianism, for both theories gave way to the contingencies of reality and followed a "pragmatic

⁶⁸ Eduard C. Lindeman, "A New Challenge to the Spirit of 1776," *Survey*, LVII (Mar. 1, 1927), 679-82; Morris Cohen, "Dictatorship on Trial," *Current History*, XXXIV (Aug. 1931), xii-xv.

⁶⁹ Walter Lippmann, "Autocracy versus Catholicism," *Commonweal*, V (Apr. 18, 1927), 627-28.

⁷⁰ Eugene S. Bagger, "The Playboy of the Southern World," *New Republic*, XLI (Dec. 3, 1924), 49-50.

⁷¹ Julien Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, tr. Richard Aldington (Boston, 1955), 98-99.

progress toward the negation of [their] premises."⁷² Lacking a normative prescription and an ethical compass, pluralistic pragmatism provided no inner check to prevent the corruption of power and the tyranny of the state. The culminating creature of this fleeting moral order was Mussolini, the "prophet of political pragmatism."⁷³

However tenuous may have been Elliott's thesis connecting Fascism to pragmatism, as a staunch liberal dedicated to the traditional forms of democracy, Elliott was, among American writers, the most active critic of Mussolini's Italy. In his debates, lectures, and writings, he continually warned political commentators that Fascism represented a dangerous departure from historic liberalism, and he chided the public for tolerating Mussolini's methods while condemning those of Stalin. In 1926 Elliott helped establish, together with the exiled historian Gaetano Salvemini, the International Committee for Political Prisoners, organized to aid the anti-Fascist cause and to inform the uncritical public of the true nature of the regime.⁷⁴

That the only thorough American critique of Fascist philosophy should come from an antipragmatic liberal suggests the theoretical weakness of the pragmatic Left in the twenties. More than one historian, generally with Hitler and Stalin in mind, has commented upon the inability of liberals to answer the rise of dictatorship because of their debilitating relativism.⁷⁵ But in fairness to the pragmatic liberals, their reaction to Mussolini must be measured against the response of American society as a whole, and in this light they emerge rather well. In contrast to the favorable opinion of the mass

⁷² William Y. Elliott, *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics: Syndicalism, Fascism, and the Constitutional State* (New York, 1928), 324.

⁷³ *Id.*, "Mussolini: Prophet of the Pragmatic Era in Politics," *Political Science Quarterly*, XLI (June 1926), 161-92. Although Elliott was unaware of the liberal defense of Fascism in this country by the writers discussed above, he saw the potential for such a defense in the social philosophy of Laski, who during the twenties was interpreting Duguit's "solidarism" to American pragmatists. (Letter from Elliott to me, Feb. 15, 1965.) Liberals of the pragmatic school received Elliott's book with understandable resentment. Kallen, who never regarded Mussolini as a pragmatist but whose own pragmatic disposition, ironically enough, made him briefly susceptible to certain features of Fascist thought, later made the distinction between liberal and authoritarian rationalism—the former being rooted in pluralism and tolerance, the latter in an intransigent cult of the state. He also attacked Elliott for lumping together a smattering of similarities in syndicalism, Fascism, and Bolshevism to claim that they all boiled from the same pot of pragmatism. "The same kind of thinking could assimilate the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence to the political notions of Thomas Aquinas and identify a horsechestnut with a chestnut horse." (Kallen, "Mussolini, William James, and the Rationalists," 256; see also Schneider's critical review of the Elliott book, *New Republic*, LVII [Nov. 21, 1928], 23.)

⁷⁴ William Y. Elliott and Gaetano Salvemini, *The Fascist Dictatorship* (New York, 1926.)

⁷⁵ Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform* (New York, 1960), 157-58, 240-42, 290-97; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston, 1962), 39-43; Daniel Aaron, *Men of Good Hope: A Story of American Progressives* (New York, 1951), 301; David Noble, *The Paradox of Progressive Thought* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1958), 247-48.

public, which continued until the Ethiopian crisis,⁷⁶ the liberals' support lasted no more than a few years and was confined to the small minority discussed above. We would do well to bear in mind that Fascism, because of its novelty, eclecticism, and ambiguity, drew admiration from conservatives as well as from liberals, from Christian disciples of natural law, from humanist advocates of ordered hierarchy, and from nervous defenders of private property, not to mention the general public, whose understanding of Fascism was shrouded by a fascination with Mussolini and his cult of personality. In the end it was, after all, not Dewey and Kallen but Santayana and Pound who found their spiritual home in Italy.

Indeed, rather than pointing up the ethical pitfalls of pragmatic relativism, the liberals' flirtation with Fascism reveals that they were not pragmatic enough. To be sure, Fascism won some liberal approval in this country because, as the first example of a society that was economically mixed and technically managed, it symbolized an untried challenge, a historical innovation that opened up new possibilities for purposeful planning. But the relationship between planning and performance raised a central contradiction in the pragmatic estimate of the Fascist system. Although several liberals endorsed Fascism because it signified the triumph of practice over theory, it was essentially the theoretical appeals of corporatism that interested them. Thus the precise benefits of "class cooperation," the party control over labor syndicates, the connection between foreign loans and industrial growth, and other such crucial concerns all went uninvestigated. Nor was the testimony of exiles like Salvemini consulted. Too caught up in the official proclamations of the Fascist government, liberals failed to see if the system was really working. This failure is most obvious in Schneider's studies. As a colleague of Dewey, who gave him "encouragement, advice, and criticism" with his book, Schneider wrote a highly complimentary study of Fascism on the grounds that it was realistic and "functional." Yet he refused to address himself to the "deeds" and "practical value" of the government, regarding his point of view as an author as something akin to that of Plato toward the republic, an indulging in "an adventure of the philosophic imagination."⁷⁷ In refusing to ascertain Fascism's "fortunes in the world of practice,"⁷⁸ Schneider was committing the most unpardonable of pragmatic sins; he was assuming the role of, to use Dewey's own phrase, the "otiose observer."

By concentrating on words rather than on deeds, by separating theory

⁷⁶ Diggins, "Mussolini's Italy," Chap. vii.

⁷⁷ Schneider, *Italy Incorporated*, 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

from practice, the pro-Mussolini liberals were simply not acting as good pragmatists. This chapter in intellectual history thus reveals less about the inherent flaws of pragmatic philosophy than about the human limitations of pragmatic thinkers. As such, the episode may still serve as a cautionary history for modern American liberalism.